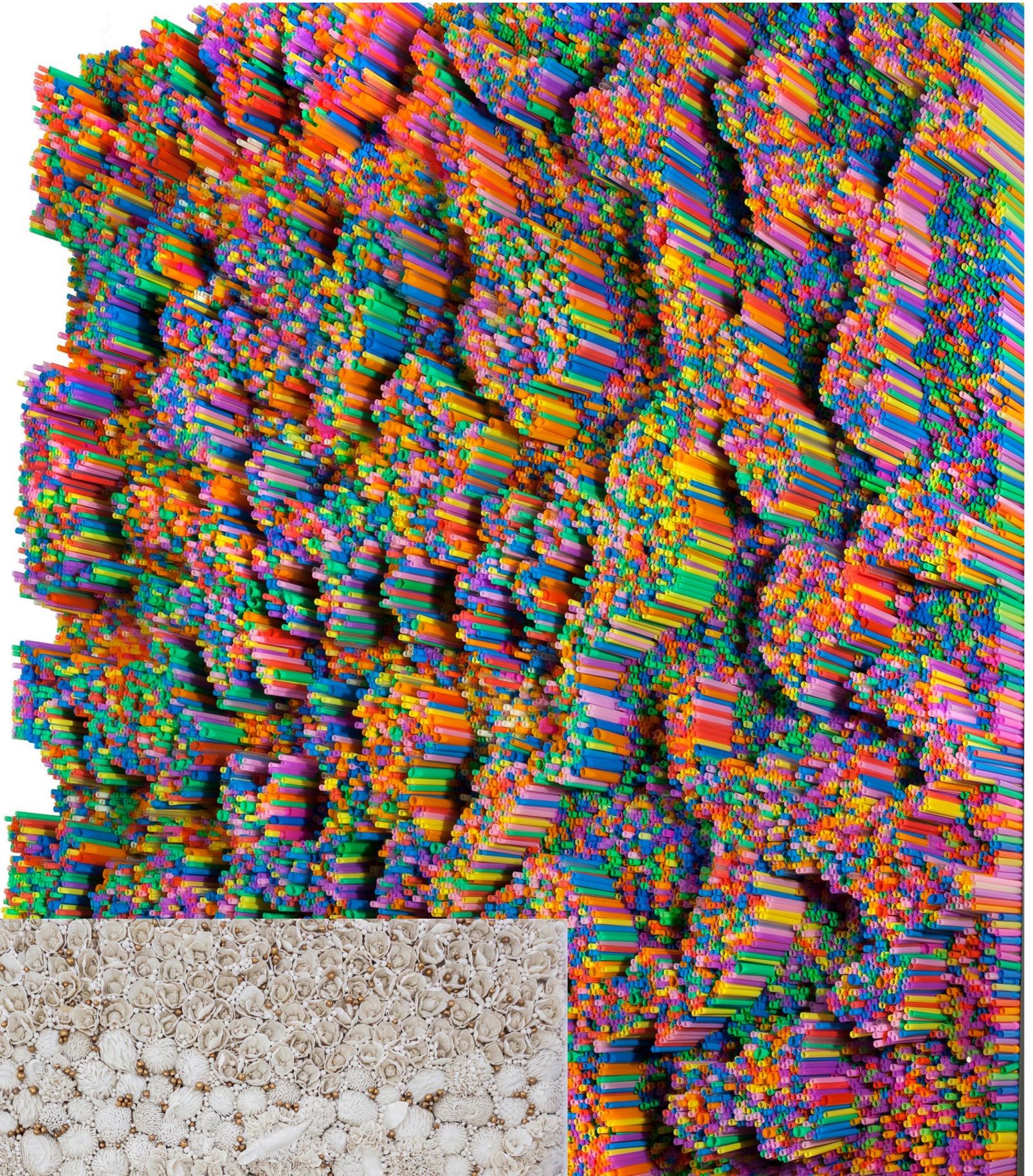


ARTS & CULTURE

The material anatomy of habitat is the theme of a dual art show



DUBAI: On view Jan. 20 – Mar. 12, Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, is presenting "Material Anatomy", Italian artist Francesca Pasquali's fourth exhibition with the gallery.

In her wall reliefs and site specific installations, manufactured plastic materials such as straws and neoprene make up intricate sculptural structures, and prompt a dialogue with the region's unique and nuanced relationship to petrochemicals.

Tightly bound or folded together, the often monochrome structures follow rhythmic configurations, recalling coral and microscopic anatomies. "Material Anatomy" presents several works across the artist's practice, including works from the Frappa series, playfully named after the iconic layered Italian pastry.

Rather than merely mimic the natural world, Pasquali's work is an ambivalent meditation on mass consumption and strongly research-based. Paying tribute to the practices of Arte Povera, she reinterprets and engages with the mundane throwaway items that make up our everyday visual landscape.

(Arte Povera (literally, poor art) is a con-

temporary art movement. The Arte Povera movement took place between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in major cities throughout Italy and above all in Turin. Other cities where the movement was also important are Milan, Rome, Genoa, Venice, Naples and Bologna. The term was introduced in Italy during the period of upheaval at the end of the 1960s, when artists were taking a radical stance. They were attacking the values of established institutions of government, industry and culture).

Often collected from landfills, the overwhelming quantities of accumulated single-use items speak to plastic's pervasive prevalence. Transforming banal objects into visual creations to be revered and preserved, the artist demonstrates that the throwaway is capable of new functions, as well as being physically sublime.

Beginning with basic, primordial compositions such as a net, a metal cage or planks of wood, Pasquali develops each piece organically, "growing" these manmade structures through holistically forming, cutting and arranging plastic items.

The performative play on creation questions the nature of conception and production, and reminds the viewer of the complex processes that underlie both organic and inorganic entities.

Emphasising its key visual characteristics of vibrant colour and impenetrable smoothness, she also underlines plastic's inherent adaptability. Both abstract and conceptually loaded, her works operate in the space between sculpture, painting and installation, further subverting categorical understandings of aesthetic experiences through the use of mirrored surfaces.

After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, Italy, Pasquali co-founded "Resilienza Italiana" in 2013, to bolster sculpture by both contemporary and emerging artists. A finalist of the 2015 Cairo Prize and Second Prize at the Henraux Foundation Prize in 2014, she has

Francesca Pasquali, *Straws. Multicolour, 2016. Straws on board.*

been invited to participate in several major international art fairs.

Her works are housed in important private and public institutions such as the Museo Diocesano, the MAR Museo d'Arte della Città, the Ghisla Art Collection, and the Thetis Foundation.

Simultaneously, the gallery is also presenting Turkish artist Melis Buyruk's debut in the UAE, with the solo show "Habitat," (Jan. 20 – Mar. 12). The exhibition showcases nine porcelain works by Buyruk, where a ceramic topography of intricate flora and fauna are encased in wooden boxes, and granted their own habitat.

In a mastery of porcelain, the traditionally feminised and overlooked art form associated with domestic life, is reinterpreted as a medium that points to bio-futurist tensions. Allowing for the deeper immersion into Buyruk's intricate and delicate porcelain world, the larger works create for a more commanding visual confrontation with Buyruk's hybrid flower forms.

She identifies and subtly blends patterns of vegetation and the natural world, creating porcelain flower fields. They are disorienting, as they evoke both artificiality and illusion in a play on logic.

While strikingly realistic and incredibly meticulous, the porcelain flowers are unfeasibly monochrome, hybrid, and eerily level, suggesting an alien environment. Lit up, and enclosed in a box, the work is further imbued with notions of the fantastical.

Fluctuating between boundaries of reality

and surreality, the show reminds the viewer of our fractured and disjointed relationship with nature. Drawn to the poetic fragility of porcelain and the physical engagement it required, Buyruk became a specialist in the craft at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Selçuk University. Her reintroduction of the material in contemporary context, recognising and manipulating its ability to uncannily mimic organic forms, has seen her works being exhibited across Turkey.

Buyruk was born in Gölcük in 1984. Her large-scale floral ceramic sculptures depart from contained, categorical forms of pottery, and celebrates the traditionally feminised discipline.

Since its establishment over three decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists.

It has won a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, it is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom present their work in the Middle East for the first time, it is dedicated to supporting the evolving practice of established artists.

Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer